

one parish to another in search of work.
And yet he must
have known Adam Smith's denunciation of
that law :

To remove a man who has committed no
misdemeanour
from the parish where he chuses to reside, is
an evident
violation of natural liberty and justice. The
common
people of England, however, so jealous of their
liberty, but
like the common people of most other
countries never
rightly understanding wherein it consists, have
now for more
than a century together suffered themselves to
be exposed to
this oppression without a remedy. . . . There
is scarce a
poor man in England of forty years of age, I
will venture to
say, who has not in some part of his life felt
himself most
cruelly oppressed by this ill-contrived law of
settlements.¹

Three Acts passed in 1691, 1697, and 1699
rendered the
provisions of this law more stringent, and
made it still
more difficult for a working man to obtain a
settlement in a
parish. They also obliged persons in receipt
of poor relief
to wear badges, and increased the penalties
imposed on
vagrants.² In three successive speeches King
William
called the attention of Parliament to the
question of 'setting
the poor at work '. In 1699 he said :

The increase of the poor is become a
burthen to the king-
dom, and their loose and idle life, does in
some measure
contribute to that depravation of manners,
which is com-
plained of. . . . As it is an indispensable duty,
that the
poor, who are not able to help themselves,
should be

maintained ; so I cannot but think it
extremely desireable,
that such as are able and willing, should
not want
employment; and such as are obstinate and
unwilling,
should be compelled to labour.³

Seventeenth-century statistics are not very
reliable, but it
seems to be clear that the poor rates for
England, which

¹ Wealth of Nations (1904), i. 142.

² G. Nicholls, History of the English Poor Law (1904), i. 279,
328, 350, 354.

³ R. Chandler, The History and Proceedings of the House
of Commons
from the Restoration to the Present Time (1742), iii, 92,
107, 128.